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NPS' Annual Acquisition Symposium Explores Critical Issues in Defense Financial Stewardship

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Article By: MC1 Grant P. Ammon

With a \$642 billion defense authorization bill standing at \$4 billion over President Barack Obama's spending cap, and \$8 billion over the limit set by the Budget Control Act of 2011, defense acquisition officials are now more than ever striving to achieve greater fiscal accountability and improved stewardship of precious military funding. Senior acquisition officials challenged with these decisions joined researchers and select representatives from the defense industry in Monterey, Calif., May 16 -17, to participate in what has become the de facto exchange of acquisition management knowledge and scholarly research.

Centered on the theme of "Creating Synergy for Informed Change," the Naval Postgraduate School's 9th annual Acquisition Research Symposium brought together nearly 300 acquisition professionals, industry representatives, and researchers to focus on affordability in defense acquisition, and capitalize on the immense body of knowledge created by the symposium's nine years of shared research. Attendees were presented with academic research and plenary discussion panels hosted by leaders in the defense acquisition community.

Opening keynote sessions – led by Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics, the Honorable Frank Kendall III, and Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Research, Development and Acquisition, the Honorable Sean Stackley – were honest, candid and to the point.

Stackley began his remarks during the second day's opening keynote by addressing the grave fiscal situation the United States is facing, and the criticality acquisition practices have in defense strategy, planning and operations. In his remarks, he reminded symposium participants of the main objectives in defense acquisition.

"Failing to improve the way we do business – and that's every aspect of the business from setting requirements, to estimating, contracting, competing, developing, building and testing – places at risk our ability to deter future wars or to carry out those missions assigned to our naval forces in the next war," noted Stackley. "It places our men and women in uniform at risk, and those risks are intolerable."

Outlining his priorities as acting Under Secretary of Defense, Kendall noted his focus is on warfighting and support to the warfighter, on affordability, and on increased efficiencies and a dedication to protecting the future. Kendall implored attendees to seek the most possible value for the DOD's buck and emphasized competition as a key to driving down cost.



The Honorable Sean Stackley, Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Research, Development and Acquisition delivers remarks on the second day of Naval Postgraduate School's 9th annual Acquisition Research Symposium, held May 16-17. (U.S. Navy photo by MC1 Grant P. Ammon)



Dr. Keith Snider, of Naval Postgraduate School's Graduate School of Business and Public Policy delivers remarks during NPS' 9th annual Acquisition Research Symposium, held May 16-17. (U.S. Navy photo by MC1 Grant P. Ammon)

Other noteworthy acquisition professionals taking part in the symposium included former Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics, Dr. Jacques Gansler, who led plenary sessions and breakout groups; Rear. Adm. David Lewis, Program Executive Officer for Ships; and, Rear Adm. Kathleen Dussault, Director of Logistics Programs and Corporate Operations, who led breakout groups focused on shipbuilding processes and logistics management during humanitarian assistance and disaster relief efforts.

Well versed on the symposium's impact, NPS President Dan Oliver saw the event as a great opportunity for participants to take part in meaningful discussions focused on improving the quality of research devoted to improving acquisition practices.

"I'm very proud the Naval Postgraduate School is able to host the symposium," said Oliver. "We are in the workforce development business, and hosting this event is a natural fit for us. This is clearly not just a conference that happens once a year, but an opportunity to continue a dialogue that goes on all year, and a chance to highlight the ongoing work that all of you are involved in, and to stimulate activities for the future."

Participants of the symposium praised the event as a unique forum that introduces academics working on acquisition research to senior policymakers in the field.

"There is no other place that brings together acquisition policymakers with those very technical people focused on research," said Dr. Bob Kenley, a Research Associate at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, who attended the symposium to present his research on the adoption of a technology readiness scale to improve technology management.

"The policymakers that came out to the symposium, and researchers, were actually interacting with and understanding each other. It makes them better able to perform their jobs, and

hopefully in the long run, it will support the military with an efficient procurement of systems that actually works,” Kenley added.

Introducing acquisition professionals and policymakers to the body of scholarly acquisition knowledge conducted or funded by NPS is a key objective of the symposium, and according to Stackley, it was an eye opening experience.

“The [Naval Postgraduate School] is the one place in the world that research is being done on acquisition,” noted Stackley. “When that is mentioned, I have to raise my eyebrows. We have to figure out how to tap into this resource better than we have been doing before.”

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